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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused February 3 news coverage on the island's sagging economy and the Taiwan government's efforts to fight the soaring unemployment rate, and on the ongoing probe into former President Chen Shui-bian's legal cases. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" criticized the Ma Ying-jeou administration for having only focused on easing cross-Straits tensions while doing nothing to enhance Taiwan's relations with the United States. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed possible developments in U.S.-China relations and concluded that "[T]he coming year will be a true test of leadership for Obama." A "Taipei Times" op-ed piece discussed the inauguration of U.S. President Barack Obama and said if Obama sticks to what he said about America being a friend to any nation and anyone who seeks a future of peace and dignity, "he should strongly endorse Taiwan's desire to determine its own future." End summary.

A) "Staying Realistic and Disregarding Spurious Achievements Will Be the Key to Success of the Ma Administration"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] editorialized (2/3):

"... Having added plenty of weight to the Chinese side of the scale, has the Ma Ying-jeou administration, since Obama took office, paid equal and corresponding efforts to balance the U.S. side of the scale in an attempt to establish and ensure sufficient trust and cooperation between Taipei and Washington? [Does the Ma administration] regard its continuous practice of the so-called diplomatic truce and its passivity [as bettering U.S.-Taiwan relations]?"

"In contrast to [the decision made by] a majority of the Taiwan people in 2008 to 'give Ma a chance to try,' the Ma administration will be facing a more severe situation this year if it seeks to play the China card and disguise it as its administrative performance, when plenty of evidence has shown that China has not changed and offered anything [to Taiwan] at all. In other words, voices coolly demanding that Ma be realistic and disregard all those sham achievements will certainly be mounting with irresistible momentum [in 2009]. Whether the government leaders will respond to public opinion and humbly examine their practices will be the key to determining the destiny of our nation."

B) "The Cost of 'Constructive' Ties"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/3):

"With North Korea again raising the specter of war in the Korean Peninsula, Afghanistan slipping out of control, continued unrest in Pakistan, a defiant Iran and a deepening global financial crisis, it was not surprising that US President Barack Obama and his Chinese counterpart, President Hu Jintao, would strike an amiable tone during their first telephone conversation late last week. ... After

all, if any of the challenges listed above - to which we might add counterterrorism and climate change - are to be resolved, a weakened US will need the help of the rising Asian giant. Aside from the economy, Afghanistan - a neighbor of China - stands out as a principal area where the US may need help, largely as a result of the impact of the global financial crisis on contributing NATO countries, many of which are nearing the end of their commitments to Afghanistan. Despite Beijing's reservations about intervening in the internal affairs of states, Washington could very well call upon it to lend an unofficial hand.

"Hu, meanwhile, must have been at his charming best during the conversation, as Obama's first week in office showed signs - with, among others, the announced closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and an end to questionable interrogation techniques by the CIA - that human rights could be at the forefront of his administration's policies. Beijing may also have been uncomfortable with US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who last week accused the administration of former US president George W. Bush of having placed too much emphasis on the economic sphere when dealing with Beijing, a hint that the new White House could very well be responsive to calls by Congress and rights organizations that Washington apply more pressure on China in the realm of human rights.

"At this juncture, it is hard to tell which direction Obama will choose when it comes to China. It would not be the first time, however, for a new administration, fresh with revolutionary zeal, to see its ideals flounder on the shores of economic and geopolitical realities, which in today's circumstances is, sadly, the likelier scenario. The list of challenges is simply too long for an administration facing serious unemployment at home and a series of commitments abroad to risk alienating an important ally like China.

... Hu - and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, for that matter - are fully aware of Obama's dependence and will strategically apply the pressure whenever it suits their needs. The coming year will be a true test of leadership for Obama. But one thing is certain: If maintaining smooth relations with China helps repair the ailing US economy, create much-needed jobs at home and alleviate the US' heavy burdens abroad, chances are that relations between Hu and Obama will be no bumpier than they were between Hu and Bush. Human rights? Former US president Bill Clinton's administration put it best - it's the economy, stupid."

#### C) "US Inauguration Inspires, Worries"

Liu Shih-chung, a visiting fellow at the Washington-based Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies of the Brookings Institution, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (2/3):

"... An internally divided Taiwan may not serve as an asset to Obama's call for 'a new era of responsibility,' particularly in the international arena. Preoccupied with two wars, regional conflicts and other daunting challenges, Asian affairs are expected to be sidelined as long as a minimum stability is maintained in the early months of the new administration. This is where anxiety comes from. The temporary detente across the Taiwan Strait no doubt meets US interests. The Obama government will encourage the Ma Ying-jeou administration to continue its efforts to engage Beijing. Washington is therefore expected to favor a policy of 'ambiguity' rather 'clarity,' or to 'talk and do less' to cross-strait relations unless something worrisome comes up.

"The irony is, Taiwan may show self-restraint and shoulder responsibility to support Obama's call, but what the county has been facing, even under the KMT government, is a regime that relentlessly demands a unilateral acceptance of the 'one China' principle as a precondition for negotiating with Taiwan's future and its international presence. ... If Obama sticks to what he said, that 'America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more,' then he should strongly endorse Taiwan's desire to determine its own future."